"Life was a fiction anyway"
Metafiction and Ian McEwan's *Sweet Tooth*

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Pro gradu -tutkielmani käsittelee metafiktion käyttöä Ian McEwanin teoksessa *Makeannälkä*. Metafiktio on käsitteenä hankala: kuten jälkimodernismi, johon se usein yhdistetään, sitä on vaikea määritellä, ja useat kirjallisuudentutkijat esittävätkin siitä toisistaan hieman eriäviä määritelmiä. Tutkijat ovat kuitenkin yhtä mieltä siitä, että metafiktio on itsensä tiedostavaa kirjallisuutta.

Vaikka metafiktio on käsitteenä melko uusi, metafiktiivisiä piirteitä on esiintynyt romaaneissa jo vuosisatojen ajan, ja ensimmäiset metafiktiivisiksi määriteltävät esimerkit löytyvätkin romaaneista jo 1700-luvulta. Osoittaakseni, että metafiktio on olennainen osa romaania, aloitan tutkimukseni katsauksella romaaniteoriaan. Kuten metafiktion, myös romaanin määritelmä vaikuttaa aiheuttavan tutkijoille päänvaivaa: ei esimerkiksi ole aivan selkeää, voidaanko jokin tietty kirja lukea kuuluvaksi romaanigenreen vai ei.

Romaaniteorian jälkeen perehdyn syvemmin metafiktion käsitteeseen. Metafiktion teorian pioneereina pidetään yleisesti Linda Hutcheonia sekä Patricia Waugh’ta, ja heihin viitataankin lähes poikkeuksetta metafiktiota koskevissa tutkimuksissa: myös oma tekstini nojaa heidän luomiinsa teorioihin. Lisäksi hyödynnän muun muassa Mika Hallilan ajatuksia. Metafiktion yhteydessä tutkin myös parodian käsitettä. Tutkimuksessani käytän lisäksi termiä metaromaani, joka tarkoittaa kirjaa kirjan sisällä. Tämän termin määrittelen pääosin David Lowenkronin tekstin kautta.

Käsiteltyäni keskeiset termit keskityn *Makeannälkä*-teokseen. Aloitan analyysini tutkimalla mikä tekee kirjasta metafiktiivisen. Hyödynnän metafiktion määrittelyssä löytämiäni piirteitä, joita tuen romaanista otetuilla katkelmilla. Tämän jälkeen pohdin mahdollisia syitä teoksen metafiktiivisyydelle, eli mietin mikä motivoi kirjailijaa luomaan metafiktiivisen tekstin.

Lopuksi teen yhteenvedon tutkimukseni tuloksista.

Avainsanat: Makeannälkä; McEwan; metafiktio; metaromaani; romaaniteoria

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1 Introduction

> . . . the metafictional novels of Barth, Coover, Barthelme, and Gass were viewed by many as marking the exhaustion of prose fiction; metafiction was commonly viewed as the death of the novel genre. But it is clear, some thirty years later, that neither has the novel died, nor has the metafictional impulse receded. On the contrary, since the late sixties metafiction has moved away from its status as the tombstone of the novel to its present status as one element among many that contribute to the dynamic matrix of postmodernism. Metafiction is clearly no longer a narrow literary phenomenon; rather, it has become a widely established cultural fact. (Stirling 2000, 100)

> The problem these fifty-nine years has been this: how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her. In her imagination she has set the limits and the terms. No atonement for God, or novelists, even if they are atheists. It was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all. (McEwan 2002, 371)

Ian McEwan's 2001 publication *Atonement* and his 2013 book *Sweet Tooth*, even though dealing with rather different subject matters – the first telling the tragic love story of a couple ripped apart by the overactive imagination of a child, the second recounting the journey of a young woman from a university student at Cambridge to an operative agent working for the British Security Service, MI5 – have a lot in common. Whereas on the surface it appears to be otherwise, a closer look reveals that both novels are in fact first and foremost narratives about creating fiction, reading fiction, experiencing and explaining things through fiction, as well as exorcising feelings through fiction. These two narratives can thus be counted as representatives of the technique often associated exclusively with postmodernist literature: metafiction.

In the primary source of this thesis, McEwan's *Sweet Tooth*, various metafictional devices are employed. Before embarking on my analysis, however, I must firstly examine the theory of the novel in general, after which I will focus on metafiction itself, as well as the concepts of parody and the metanovel. The purpose of beginning the theory section with a discussion on the theory of the novel is merely to shed light on the origins of metafiction, to illustrate that its features have been

present since the birth of the novel. There are two primary research questions, which are dealt with in section 3. Firstly I aim to explore the features that make the book metafictive. Having answered the first research question it is possible to attempt to answer the second one: why is *Sweet Tooth* metafictive? To answer the latter question is the main focus of the thesis.

Metafiction appears to be a recurring theme in McEwan's literature as well as in recent McEwan studies, and the purpose of my research is to contribute to the latter collection. As *Sweet Tooth* is a rather recent publication, it has not been exhausted from the point of view of academic study. However, this also entails that my thesis will mostly have to rely on more general theoretical literature as opposed to academic work focusing on the book specifically. To my knowledge, *Sweet Tooth* has as of yet not been studied at all from the point of view metafiction, apart from this thesis. Thus I will lean heavily on general theories of metafiction while also making use of studies carried out on McEwan's *Atonement* and its metafictive features. It should be noted, however, that while *Atonement* is mentioned on various occasions throughout the upcoming pages, the primary source of this thesis is *Sweet Tooth*.

Metafictive writing, its history and its definition, appear to be a source for disagreement and debate among literary academics: some link it strongly with postmodernism whereas others consider the two to be completely different concepts and see metafiction as a part of literature and the novel in general. One key feature that is agreed upon, however, is that a metafictive text consciously and purposefully turns its focus back on itself as a literary text: ". . . a generation of writers working through and beyond the postmodern are practicing what Ian McEwan calls 'some kind of balance between a fiction that is self-reflective on its own processes, and one that has a forward impetus too'" (James 2011, 493).

The two theoretical landmarks of metafiction, the works that have been cited or commented on in most studies carried out on the subject since, are Linda Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1988) and *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*

(1991), as well as Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984).When it comes to the academic discourse concerning metafiction these two pioneering theorists are not always agreed with; in fact in some instances they are stated to be outright in the wrong, which will be further discussed in the theory section 2.2. Nonetheless, the scholarly value of Waugh and Hutcheon's work is by no means to be underestimated, and in this thesis I intend to make use of the theories they provide. In addition to these I will draw on other studies on metafiction.

What makes metafiction an interesting theory for this thesis is the fact that as it turns its attention back on itself as a literary artefact it simultaneously takes the reader on a journey into creating and receiving fiction, and in the cases of McEwan's *Sweet Tooth* and *Atonement*, on a journey into making a novel: "What makes literary reflexivity different is that such an act of consciousness is revealed there in the literary process itself, carried out through the linguistic medium in a course of mediation by literary language and generic codes" (Kao 1997, 60). The author reveals the process of creating literature, and the reader has a front row seat. The principal topic of metafiction is fiction itself.

Sweet Tooth offers a variety of metafictionist traits for scrutiny: to name a few, not only does the book discuss literature in various forms and ways, from reading through teaching and studying to writing, not to mention the embedded short stories, the work as a whole is essentially a novel within a novel, namely the already mentioned 'metanovel'. The following quotation, perhaps one of the most defining metafictional moments of *Sweet Tooth*, shall act as an introduction into this study on metafiction.

> Without leaving the chair he stretched forward and picked up John Fowles's *The Magus* and said he admired parts of that, as well as all of *The Collector* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. I said I didn't like tricks, I liked life as I knew it recreated on the page. He said it wasn't possible to recreate life on the page without tricks. (McEwan 2013, 214)

The following pages will study the "tricks" used to recreate "life on the page". Before embarking on the actual analysis, the first aim of this thesis is to define the definition-resisting concept of metafiction, in relation to which also the concepts of parody and the metanovel will be discussed. While I begin the theory section with a discussion on the theory of the novel, the theoretical emphasis of this thesis is on metafiction.

2 Is there a Difference between Fiction and Life – Theory

As stated in the introduction, I have chosen to discuss the theory of the novel in my thesis for the purpose of illustrating that while metafiction and metafictive features are admittedly more pronounced in some novels and some eras than others, metafiction is in fact a basic, inherent quality of the novel that has been around for as long as the novel, if not longer: "Imaginative play with the duplicity of literary conventions is by no means the invention of the novel – one has only to think of the toying with supposed source-manuscripts in medieval romance and the use of inductions and plays-within-plays in Renaissance theater" (Alter 1975, 34). Thus, as Alter here states, metafictive features have been in use long before the novel genre itself. In exemplifying the characteristics of metafiction I will make use of narratives created before the era of the novel. However, for the purposes of this thesis in terms of theory it is unnecessary to go further back in time than the birth of the novel.

As mentioned above, the term 'metafiction' has not reached a definition that is widely agreed upon. However, it is most often used in relation to postmodernist literature, the possible reasons for which will be discussed below. In this section I intend to demonstrate that metafiction should not be linked exclusively to postmodernism. The literary examples provided in section 2.2.1 help to further illustrate that metafictive features predate the novel genre, while they admittedly appear to have

become more prominent as time has passed. I will begin my analysis by examining the novel in general. I will also consider the instruments the novelist has at their disposal, tools which are employed when making a narrative, and consequently in making it metafictive.

Having outlined the theory of the novel I will then discuss the main focus of this thesis, metafiction, in more detail. The theory section will finish with a discussion on parody and the metanovel, both prominent characteristics of metafiction, in their own sections.

2.1 Theory of the Novel

The novel as a genre is not an old one, yet it certainly is versatile enough to the extent that it almost resists theorisation and categorisation: Alter refers to it as a "bewilderingly capacious genre" (1975, xii). This can even be seen in relation to literary classics: Emily Brontë's 1847 publication *Wuthering Heights*, for example, is without a doubt considered a novel by one critic (Schorer 1967, 67), and merely as a narrative following the conventions of "the tale or the ballad" (Frye 1967, 32) by another. The definition of a novel appears to depend on how much into detail one wants to go: "[The literary historian] finally discovers that the word novel, which up to about 1900 was still the name of a more or less recognizable form, has since expanded into a catchall term which can be applied to practically any prose book that is not 'on' something" (Frye 1967, 32). What Frye argues here is that the term 'novel', once reserved only for a particular kind of literary creation, has since been made into a kind of umbrella term for many types of fiction, a home for narratives that cannot be neatly placed into other categories.

The novel, which is usually written in prose, is a lengthy narrative which describes events in the lives of its characters, usually chronologically. Thus, it can also be referred to as the realistic

novel. One of the prominent features of the realistic novel is its true-to-life presentation of the world we live in.

> The novelist moves cautiously from the real to the fictional world, and takes pains to conceal the movement. Fictional characters are therefore provided with a context of particularity much like that with which we define ourselves and others in the real world: they have names, parents, possessions, occupations, etc., ordered in such a way as not to violate our sense of probability derived from the empirical world. (Lodge 1966, 42)

Thus in what is here considered a traditional novel the novelist "hides" themselves behind the text, possibly without making a conscious decision on the matter: the focus of the story is clearly on the narrated events. The author creates a fictional world which the reader can enter that works similarly to the real world in order to make the narrative believable and understandable, to fade away its fictitiousness by making the characters and events act as if in real life: "[Fiction] represents events, or imitates discourses, that we assimilate through nonfictional modes of narrative understanding" (Walsh 2007, 13). The reader's understanding of the world is what enables them to understand the realistic novel, as the latter is made to work similarly to the former.

Booth claims that "All novels are said to be aiming for a common degree of realistic intensity; ambiguity and irony are discussed as if they were always beauties, never blemishes. Point-of-view should always be used 'consistently,' because otherwise the realistic illusion will be destroyed" (1967, 89). Whereas the quotation from Booth bears perhaps a somewhat resentful tone, it does reveal characteristics that are commonly thought to be essential to a realistic novel: the realistic illusion should not be destroyed, therefore point of view must remain the same throughout the novel. Furthermore, according to Booth a novel is claimed to aim for 'realistic intensity'. This further emphasises the fact that the novel genre appears to be rather deeply embedded in the realist tradition.

Alter states that "the overriding subject of the novel in almost all its forms would seem to be the disparity between the structures of the imagination and things as they are, novelistic plot consisting in the multifarious effects of that disparity on the protagonist and the personages

involved with him or (often) her" (1975, 87). What Alter argues here is that a novel often focuses on the protagonist, how they act in their ordinary life, and how the human mind functions in relation to the world. This view is shared by Frye, who states that "The novel tends to be extroverted and personal; its chief interest is in human character as it manifests itself in society" (1967, 36). It appears thus to be safe to state that a novel usually focuses on a person, a protagonist, who is explored in relation to the world they live in.

Our understanding of the workings of the real world helps us understand the world of the novel, perhaps without even realising it. Ultimately it is up to the author's technique to create this world for the reader.

> When we speak of technique, then, we speak of nearly everything. For technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and finally, of evaluating it. And surely it follows that certain techniques are sharper tools than others, and will discover more; that the writer capable of the most exacting technical scrutiny of his subject matter will produce works with the most satisfying content, works with thickness and resonance, works which reverberate, works with maximum meaning. (Schorer 1967, 66)

What Schorer suggests here is that when a novelist chooses a technique for their writing, they also choose what they wish to convey to the reader with their text, or vice versa: the aim of their writing determines the technique they choose. Technique, according to Schorer, trumps subject matter in importance (1967, 66): *how* something is presented is more important than *what* is presented. In fiction technique is constituted for example by language and point of view.

"The novelist's medium is language: whatever he does, *qua* novelist, he does in and through language" (Lodge 1966, ix); while literature is made possible first and foremost by language, the verbal medium demands the writer to make multiple decisions. How do the characters speak? Do they have accents? Can they be linked to a location or social group based on how they talk? What kind of vocabulary do they use? What kind of vocabulary does the narrator use? Does it connect the narrative into a context? While authors rarely go into extremes (cf. Joyce's 1939 publication

Finnegans Wake), the language they use is a versatile instrument: the choice of words, for example, can provide subtle hints as to the theme or upcoming events, or it can further anchor a narrative or a character into a specific context. Language is the most important tool at the author's disposal: literature is created and only exists through language.

After deciding on the language the author must consider the choice of point of view:

> We all agree that point-of-view is in some sense a technical matter, a means to a larger ends; whether we say that technique is the artist's way of discovering his artistic meaning or that it is his way of working his will upon his audience, we still can judge it only in the light of the larger meanings or effects which it is designed to serve. (Booth 1967, 89)

What Booth states here is that in choosing a point of view the author makes a big decision concerning the text, and the reader has no part in this: the author makes the decision based on what they want the text to achieve. Booth groups his narrators into three categories: the implied author (the author's second self), the undramatised narrator and the dramatised narrator (1967, 92-93). By an implied author Booth means a "highly refined and selected version [of the actual author], wiser, more sensitive, more perceptive than any real man could be". The undramatised narrator stands for a neutral narrator, who can be defined through a pronoun or not. Finally, the dramatised narrator is personified even to a great extent, usually differing greatly from the implied author. It is noteworthy here, that while Booth speaks of self-conscious narrators (1967, 96), he wrote his essay before the coining of the term 'metafiction', further illustrating that metafictive features are an inherent part of the novel.

We have thus established that technique, including language and point of view are the novelist's tools. Naturally, there are other instruments at the novelist's disposal, for example plot. However, within the limits of this thesis it is unnecessary to go into those. In terms of technique and language, this is where metafiction comes into the discussion. "Technique in fiction, all this is a way of saying, we somehow continue to regard as merely a means of organizing material which is "given" rather than as the means of exploring and defining the values in an area of experience

which, for the first time *then*, are being given" (Schorer 1967, 67. Original emphasis): technique in fiction creates a paradox, which is inherent in metafiction. The term is discussed in detail in the following sections.

At this point it is noteworthy to point out that while this thesis suggests that self-consciousness is an inherent quality of the novel genre, this does not mean that the admittedly somewhat fragmented definition of the novel should be thrown out all together: "The ultimate intent of this critical argument is not to tell readers that novels have been doing something other than what they thought all along, only to suggest that novels have been doing rather more than prevalent critical assumption would allow" (Alter 1975, xv). While Alter's statement is from four decades ago, it is still valid: it is noteworthy that it does not threaten the novel in any way.

2.2 Metafiction, Parody and the Metanovel

Most of the literary discussion, and certainly the most prolific at that, surrounding metafiction took place in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Since then various literary scholars have attempted to arrive at a consensus, or at least to be able to offer a more refined definition of the term. It appears, however, that to this day most researchers have corrections and improvements to offer on one another's efforts, and one exhaustive definition has not been found. Thus in this thesis I am making use of various definitions as well as various characteristics associated with metafiction instead of one clear-cut description.

The metafictional phenomenon can be referred to with a variety of names: the self-begetting novel, the narcissistic novel, the self-referential novel, the self-reflexive novel, the self-conscious novel, the self-reflective novel, autorepresentation, the introverted novel, the list could go on and on. Whereas these terms are admittedly not strictly synonyms, they each stand for a novel that turns

its attention back on itself as a literary creation. For this thesis I have chosen to opt for the term 'metafiction' for the purpose of clarity, and for the fact that I consider it to be the most neutral out of the list of possible terminology.

According to Waugh, writers of metafiction "…all explore a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction" (1988, 2. Original emphasis). As Waugh here states, these writers have as their approach what they have as their subject matter as well. Hutcheon adds that "[Metafiction] provides, within itself, a commentary on its own status as fiction and as language, and also on its own processes of production and reception" (1991, xii). What comes across with Hutcheon's argument here is that in metafiction literary theory and conventions are explored *through* literary fiction while drawing attention to the artificiality of the text. Why, then, would an author choose to explore this theory? A possible motivation for employing metafictionist devices in literature appears to be that the author wishes to draw the readers' attention onto considering their own presence, their existence, the world around them, their roles as readers. Sadovska argues that

> Abandonment of coherence, bricolage, pastiche, mise-en-abyme and other experimental devices challenge the role of convention in fiction and produce the impression that modern fiction is derived of any sense; it is predeterminedly illogical, irrational, or surreal. Only through the joint efforts of the author and the readers will it be possible to discover the meaning in the fictive discourse. (2007, 67)

What is in fact real? Is everything fiction? And even if it is not, is the world around us in fact textual, and to what extent? The motivations behind metafictionist strategies are discussed in detail in section 3.2 in relation to *Sweet Tooth*.

Pearse notes that "Metafictionists often explicitly reveal the component parts of their narrative technique and separate 'the material to be presented from the forms that serve its presentation in order to provoke the reader into establishing for himself the connections between perception and thought'" (1980, 75). The reader becomes the subject rather than the inactive object, and the purpose of the text is to make the reader think: ". . . readers of metafiction are invited, though not compelled, to question how their own worlds are similar textually" (Stirling 2000, 82).

While the reader is made to ponder the relationship between fiction and reality, Hutcheon points out that "For the reader/critic of metafiction, overt diegetic narcissism seems to involve the thematizing within the story of its storytelling concerns – parody, narrative conventions, creative process – with an eye to teaching him his new, more active role" (1991, 53). As seen here, Hutcheon as well notes the more active role of the reader, but in addition emphasises that metafictive texts bring the narrative structures to the fore.

In addition to a metafictive text having a creator in the author, it also has a receiver in the reader. The fascination of reading metafiction could be that "If the novel seems to us so successful a vehicle for a realistic picture of the world, it may be that we see in the ambiguous irony of the novel the most accurate reflection of the unsure "realities" of human life" (Shroder 1967, 26): one can never be sure what life will bring, and the same is true of fiction. This inherent nature of metafiction brings us back to the novel being a realistic representation of the real world while making us question it at the same time.

In my analysis I have chosen to discuss the metanovel in its own section separately as a distinctive branch of metafiction. I will begin with an outline of the literary discourse surrounding the term 'metafiction' before moving on to explaining the term itself. To illustrate the typical features I will use examples from widely read works of fiction from various eras, to exemplify the inherent nature of metafiction in prose. I will then move on to discussing the concept of parody which is a prevalent part of the discussion surrounding metafiction. The discussion on parody takes place in relation to metafiction as opposed to focusing on parody in general. Finally, I will wrap up the theoretical discussion with the metanovel. It must be stated that the features I name when defining metafiction are not all strictly metafictive, but many of them can well be employed outside metafiction as well.

2.2.1 Metafiction

In literary discourse metafiction is often considered first and foremost a part of postmodernist literature. Some literary scholars even go as far as stating that the two concepts are practically interchangeable, whereas others point out that in fact metafictive features have been present to varying degrees throughout the lifespan of the novel.

> If metafiction characteristically internalises the relationship between authors and readers, fiction and criticism or art and life, we find its antecedents throughout literary history. Chaucer's elaborate framings of *The Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare's plays within plays, the extensive use of epistolary forms in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century poetry and fiction, or the intrusive narrators of Fielding and Richardson, are all in a sense precursors of the metafictional paradox. (Currie 1995, 5)

As Currie here states, precursors of metafictive paradoxes can be traced back all the way to the Middle Ages. Some academics, for example Waugh – stating that ". . . metafiction is just one form of post-modernism . . ." (1988, 22) – strongly associate postmodernism and metafiction with one another. This is not to say that these researchers maintain that metafiction was invented by the postmodernists; however, the focus of their scholarly work appears to be on the metafiction of the postmodernist era. On the other hand, Currie, to name one, approaches the issue rather differently as seen in the quotation above: in fact the few metafictive features that Currie mentions have been in frequent usage for centuries. Hallila, taking the issue even further, goes all the way to the other end of the spectrum as he states that metafiction is not a part of postmodernism, nor is it its feature (2006, 15). It should be noted, however, that Hallila does state that metafiction is an inherent characteristic of the novel genre, but that during the postmodernist era it becomes a more central and visible feature of the novel (Hallila 2006, 75).

While there is no agreement on the term among scholars, some might even have a complete change of heart on their own: Hallila points out that in Hutcheon's 1980 publication *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* she considers postmodernism to be too "limiting" for a concept as broad as metafiction:

> In the Introduction, it will be clear that several years ago I explicitly rejected the term "postmodernism" and opted instead for the more descriptive one of metafiction. Although I would still stand behind my objections to the label, it seems to have stuck, and it would be foolish to deny that metafiction is today recognized as a manifestation of postmodernism. (1991, xii-xiii)

In her 1988 book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, however, she states that the most typical novel type of the postmodernist era is 'historiographic metafiction', abandoning the concept of 'metafiction' as relating only to novels of the late modernist era (Hallila 2006, 72). Hutcheon views historiographic metafiction and metafiction in general as two different concepts: "Historiographic metafiction, in deliberate contrast to what I would call such late modernist radical metafiction, attempts to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical, and it does so both thematically and formally" (1988, 108). While this might not constitute a contradiction as such, it nevertheless shows that even the most pioneering scholars of metafiction are unsure of what to associate the term with, or might have to rethink their definition of the term as time passes. For the purposes of this thesis, however, the more general concept of metafiction is chosen instead of historiographic metafiction, as the term would appear to be more neutral and perhaps in wider use than that of Hutcheon's.

Waugh seems to be somewhat unclear of her stand as well, as while she discusses metafiction as mostly a part of postmodern literature she states the following: "…metafiction is not so much a sub-genre of the novel as a tendency *within* the novel which operates through exaggeration of the tensions and oppositions inherent in all novels: of frame and frame-break, of technique and counter-technique, of construction and deconstruction of illusion" (1988, 14. Original emphasis). This suggests that Waugh as well is aware of metafictionist features having been present in the novel genre since its origins, however she chooses to treat metafiction as mostly a postmodernist phenomena. Admittedly, metafictionist traits became more prominent during the postmodernist era, however, this further emphasizes the difficulties in defining metafiction: while most scholars admit

to metafictionist features being a part of the novel genre from its origins, many opt to treat metafiction as a feature of postmodernist literature.

Hutcheon divides metafiction into narrative and linguistic variations, and both aforementioned further into overt and covert forms.

> There are texts which are, as has been mentioned, diegetically self-aware, that is, conscious of their own narrative processes. Others are linguistically self-reflective, demonstrating their awareness of both the limits and the powers of their own language. In the first case, the text presents itself as diegesis, as narrative; in the second, it is unobfuscated text, language. . . . each can be present in at least two forms, what one might term an overt and covert one. Overt forms of narcissism are present in texts in which the self-consciousness and self-reflection are clearly evident, usually explicitly thematized or even allegorized within the "fiction". In its covert form, however, this process would be structuralized, internalized, actualized. Such a text would, in fact, be self-reflective, but not necessarily self-conscious. (1991, 22-23)

Thus, according to Hutcheon, there are at least four types of metafiction: the first two make use of metafiction in the narration, and it can be visible or more concealed. The latter two types employ metafictionist devices through language and its use, and these can as well be explicit or implicit. The distinction into overt and covert forms is interesting, as it could be argued to be the defining difference between a text being self-reflective and self-conscious.

According to Waugh, "Metafictional deconstruction has not only provided novelists and their readers with a better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative; it has also offered extremely accurate models for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems" (1988, 9). Thus, according to Waugh, metafiction in a way reveals the technical components of literature, breaching the gap between creator and receiver. In addition to this it draws the reader's attention to the textual nature of the world around them and how everything linguistic is related in one way or another through signs.

One of the earliest and best known examples of metafictive features in prose that is often mentioned is Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, originally from 1759:

> Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine; - they are the life, the soul of reading! - take them out of this book, for instance, - you might as well take the book along with them; - one cold eternal winter would reign in every page of it; restore them to the writer; - he steps forth like a bridegroom, - bids All-hail; brings in variety, and forbids the appetite to fail. (Sterne 1967, 53)

In this paragraph, for example, there is the obvious indication to the artificiality of the text, a self-conscious comment: "take them out of this book, for instance". There are also references to reading, to the author and what goes into making a book. The aim of this brief example is to show that many metafictive features have been a part of literature for much longer than the postmodernist era as already mentioned above. As de Groot states:

> Yet it must be argued that the concepts which Waugh and Hutcheon celebrate in historiographic metafiction have been present in historical novels since their inception: self-consciousness, indeterminacy, the problematising of ordering narratives. At the same time, we might quibble that many historical novels have a conservative agenda, seeking to close off debate and dialogue, and that to read them as dissident is to read against the grain, a decidedly post-structuralist approach. (2010, 121)

It should be noted here, however, that in this quotation de Groot focuses on historiographic metafiction, whereas this thesis mainly centres around metafiction in general. Furthermore, whereas de Groot mentions historical novels, in this thesis I have made the conscious decision to focus on the novel in general. This being said it can be suggested that what de Groot points out in relation to historiographic metafiction and the historical novel are also applicable to the realistic novel and to metafiction in general: the features he points out are all characteristics of metafiction, on which more below.

Admittedly, whereas metafictional features have been in existence for a while longer than the postmodernist era, the word itself is a much newer invention: according to the Oxford English Dictionary the term was first used in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1960 (OED online, accessed April 10th 2015). This might be one explanation as to why metafictionist literature is often associated with, or at times even used synonymously with postmodernist fiction. Hallila, who was mentioned above for strictly separating metafiction from postmodernism, also points out that as a

concept metafiction is often associated with postmodernist literary discourse (2006, 37). One must, nonetheless, acknowledge here that many narratives can be treated as both metafictive and postmodernist: whereas the two terms are far from synonyms, they are by no means mutually exclusive either. Interestingly, in his 1975 publication *Partial Magic:' The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre*, which focuses on self-reflexive fiction, Robert Alter avoids the term 'metafiction', instead opting for the term 'self-conscious' for the most part.

Hallila notes as well that the words 'postmodern' and 'metafictive' are often used as synonyms, and they are exemplified using the same narratives (2006, 68-69). Hallila then states that ". . . attempting to understand postmodernism from its own starting points one is able to appreciate why in the postmodernist context, in the postmodernist debate and in the postmodern way of thinking there appears to be a prolific breeding ground for the emergence of metafiction as a concept" (Hallila 2006, 65. Translation by KH). It is also during postmodernism that metafictive writing has begun to be employed more widely, more visibly, perhaps more purposefully, as a means to achieve specific ends. As mentioned, the literary discourse concerning metafiction is all but concurrent, and will possibly stay that way. However, as this thesis attempts to demonstrate, while metafiction was named and its features became more prominent and recognisable during the postmodernist era, metafictive features are an inherent part of the novel genre. Thus in my analysis I intend to treat metafiction as a feature of literature and the novel in general as opposed to linking it strongly with postmodernism.

As stated in the introduction, most studies on metafiction lean heavily on theories created by Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh, and these two are often considered the pioneers of theorising metafiction. Two and a half decades after their publication, these theories have since been criticised by other literary theorists, among them for example Walsh (on Hutcheon 1995, 37-38) and Hallila (2006, quoted above). Hallila states that Waugh's and Hutcheon's theories leave the definition of metafiction, roughly translated, as "flexible, open, vague and unclear" (Hallila 2006, 10). Hallila

then goes on to state, however, that while the concept of metafiction is often obscure, nevertheless it has to be defined somehow to enable academic discussion (Hallila 2006, 13).

One of the scholars attempting to define metafiction is Walsh. According to him, there are degrees of metafictiveness.

> It is important to distinguish between a novel that employs occasional metafictional devices and one to which metafiction is essential, and which can therefore be designated *a* metafiction; between truly metafictional *self-reference*, in which the medium is incorporated as subject, and more general *self-consciousness*, in which it is simply acknowledged; and between fictions that are avowedly metafictional and those that are only rendered so by the violence of critical interpretation. (Walsh 1995, 37. Original emphasis.)

What Walsh argues here is that in his opinion the term 'metafiction' is often misused: not all novels employing metafictionist devises are, in fact, metafiction, but merely novels that make use of self-conscious features. He goes on to state that ". . . texts that heighten their own status as fiction are not fictions *about* fiction, but only fictions that declare themselves as such" (Walsh 1995, 39. Original emphasis). What this suggests is that it is important to make a distinction between literature that makes it known that it is literature, thus literature employing metafiction, and literature that is strictly self-conscious literature about literature, thus metafiction. A decade later Walsh adds that "In general, self-consciousness in fiction is awareness of narrative artifice (insistence upon it, celebration of it, perhaps ironic despair at it), but beyond that it is also necessarily the incorporation of such artifice within the purview of its own rhetoric, as grist to its own mill" (2007, 42).

What, then, is this elusive and mysterious 'metafiction'? While the various terms mentioned above provide a little insight into the matter, Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as "a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 1988, 2). Two points come across here: firstly, a metafictional novel purposefully makes it known that it is fiction one is reading. This can be done in various different ways, which will be discussed in

detail below. Secondly, the function of this is to make the reader consider aspects of fictionality and reality in relation to one another, about the creative process behind literature, and about the fictitiousness of everyday life:

> Metafictional novels continually alert the reader to this consequence of the creation/description paradox. To make a statement in fiction is to make a character. All statements have 'meaning' in relation to the context in which they are uttered, but in fiction the statement is the character is the context. (Waugh 1988, 92)

The metafictive quotation from *Atonement* in the beginning of the introduction also discusses similar ideas: author as god, deciding outcomes. Whereas this 'something is created as it is described' paradox is an inherent feature in all literature, what makes it interesting in metafiction is that the reader is purposefully made aware of this: narrative structures and techniques are made visible.

Some typical features of metafiction have already been mentioned in the quotation from Currie at the beginning of this chapter, namely frames, stories within stories, the epistolary novel and intrusive narrators. Frames have been used in literature for centuries, and for example the fourteenth century classic, Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, whereas not being metafictive as such, still uses a frame story into which a number of short stories are incorporated. *One Thousand and One Nights*, or *Arabian Nights*, shares a similar structure, but has another metafictive feature as well, namely an unreliable narrator, which will be returned to later.

The story within a story structure is similar to the framing technique, with the exception that in the matter of frame stories usually the focus is on the short stories they contain and they eventually circle back to the framing narrative – for example Chaucer's fourteenth century collection *The Canterbury Tales* – whereas a short story within a story is usually less important, and the main focus is on the outer narrative. In the case of a short story within an outer narrative the possibility of autocriticism may present itself, as the short story can provide an implicit or explicit commentary on the outer narrative.

Autocriticism, in essence, is criticism of self or one's own work. As Alter states, "Most self-conscious novels . . . lend themselves splendidly to analytic criticism because they operate by the constant redeployment of fiction's formal categories" (1975, 220). Autocriticism offers a medium for pointing out negative or positive features or reviewing the text itself, which can be made either explicitly or implicitly. Autocriticism is thus another metafictional device, and it shares characteristics with the *mise en abyme* structure, which in the Oxford English Dictionary is defined as "(A term denoting) self-reflection within the structure of a literary work; a work employing self-reflection". The *mise en abyme* structure will be discussed further in relation to the metanovel. It should be noted, however, that autocriticism does not limit itself to the story within a story format. Variations of a story within a story include a play within a play – for example in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1590's) and other plays as mentioned above – or a play within a novel, which happens for example in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2002) with Briony Tallis's play *The Trials of Arabella*.

The epistolary novel is a rather different matter. In this format the narrative usually consists of letters written by one or more of the characters, but also books in diary format are included in this category, as well as other kinds of documentation such as newspaper articles or more recently, e-mails. Stephen Chbosky's 1999 publication *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is an example of an epistolary novel consisting of letters, whereas the diary format can be exemplified with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) or, to give a more recent example, John Fowles's *The Collector* (1963), or more recent still, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones* series (1996-2013). As for intrusive narrators – which were already mentioned above – usually most omniscient narrators are considered intrusive, while the definition of an intrusive narrator is a narrator who comments on either the narrative or the characters, or both. For example in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) the narrator is intrusive.

Other devices of metafictional writing, which I will first name and then proceed to explain and exemplify, include for example intertextuality, the narrative of the book being written or read by a character in the book, characters that in the narrative are or become aware of their own fictional status, the arbitrary nature of language being brought to the reader's attention, and a narrator or character who addresses the reader directly. A variation of an intrusive narrator or character can also be found in the use of footnotes, which is simultaneously a form of intratextuality – as the footnotes in literary fiction usually refer back to the text itself as opposed to referring to other texts which is usually the case of footnotes in academic writing – while combining literary criticism and fiction.

Intertextuality is a method used widely in all kinds of literature, and it can be both visible, as in the case of Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) which opens with a direct quotation of a poem by Thomas Hardy, or it can be a more hidden allusion to another text that will only be visible to the reader if they know the text or texts being referred to. For example McEwan's *Atonement* refers to Dante's fourteenth century epic poem *The Divine Comedy* on several occasions (Dahlbäck 2009, 3). What makes intertextuality a metafictive feature is that it more often than not draws the reader's attention more or less purposefully to the fact that it is literature, a fiction they are reading, while simultaneously giving the narrative a context or providing the reader with hints as to where the narrative is going. Intertextuality, however, is not always used as a metafictive technique.

An inherently metafictional feature is employed when characters become aware of their own fictionality, which happens for example in Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605-1615) when Sancho Panza informs Don Quixote that a book has been written about his adventures. A somewhat similar technique is applied when the narrator or character addresses the reader directly, which happens for example in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847); "Reader, I married him" (Brontë 1999, 397), a technique known as 'breaking the fourth wall'. An example of the arbitrary nature of

language being brought to the reader's attention can be found in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939), where the language of the narrative can change mid-word.

The use of footnotes in literary fiction can be considered a special branch of metafiction. "Footnotes in a literary work highlight the interplay between author and subject, text and reader, that is always at work in fiction, giving us occasion to speculate on self-reflective narration as an aspect of textual authority" (Benstock 1983, 205). As mentioned, footnotes in a way combine fiction with literary criticism: it is as if the author tries to beat their critic to the punch. Essentially footnotes are yet another form of autocriticism. Fielding's *Tom Jones* employs this technique, as well as Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.

The story of the narrative being written, or sometimes read, by a character in the book is an overtly metafictional device. This feature essentially makes the work a metanovel. The aforementioned *Tristram Shandy* is a prime example of this, as well as McEwan's *Atonement*, in addition to Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). The metanovel is discussed in more detail in section 2.2.3.

2.2.2 Parody

Parody is a concept that is frequently associated with metafictionist literature. As stated above, metafiction is often intertextual: it habitually refers to other works of literature overtly or covertly. Parody in literature is a somewhat related method: enough characteristics of the original are kept in order for the reader to recognise what is being parodied. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'parody' as

> A literary composition modelled on and imitating another work, *esp.* a composition in which the characteristic style and themes of a particular author or genre are satirized by being applied to inappropriate or unlikely subjects, or are otherwise exaggerated

> for comic effect. In later use extended to similar imitations in other artistic fields, as music, painting, film, etc. (OED online, accessed April 10th 2015)

Thus, according to the definition in the OED, in literature authors, individual works or entire genres can be parodied through satirising them or by exaggeration, often producing a humorous effect. Satire, as defined by the OED, stands for "A poem or (in later use) a novel, film, or other work of art which uses humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, esp. as a form of social or political commentary" (OED online, accessed April 10th 2015).

Also Hutcheon, Waugh and Hallila relate parody to metafiction. According to Waugh (1984, 70) and Hallila (2006, 99), the novel as it is today might not even exist without parody: parody is a force that drives its chosen object forward, questioning what once was and offering a new, hopefully improved alternative. In metafictive literature, at least according to Waugh, what seems to be parodied often is an entire genre, specifically that of the novel: "More commonly, metafiction parodies the *structural* conventions and motifs of the novel itself (as in *Tristram Shandy*) or of particular modes of that genre" (Waugh 1984, 74. Original emphasis).

Parody, according to Waugh (1984, 64), is something that often appears when a genre is in crisis, in danger of becoming obsolete or irrelevant. Waugh (1984, 63-) states that while metafictive features are an integral part of the novel, they are not easily seen as a source of renewal, in fact quite the opposite. However, through parody metafiction can be seen as a force which drives the genre forward.

> In fact, parody in metafiction can equally be regarded as another level of positive literary change, for, by undermining an earlier set of fictional conventions which have become automatized, the parodist clears the path for a new, more perceptible set. The problem arises because parody is double-edged. A novel that uses parody can be seen either as destructive or as critically evaluative and breaking out into new creative possibilities. (Waugh 1984, 64)

Thus, according to Waugh, parody in metafiction is a source for development, for change, a way to criticise the prevalent forms. Outdated constructions are greatly emphasised or made fun of in order to better them, to continually develop.

While the ‘death of the novel’ has been declared on various occasions during the twentieth century, Waugh advocates that parody and metafiction, often seen as “inward-looking and decadent” (1984, 64) are in fact a source for positive change, a force that renews. She goes on to state that parody in literature has two functions, the critical and the creative: “The *critical* function of parody thus discovers which forms can express which contents, and its *creative* function releases them for the expression of contemporary concerns” (1984, 69. Original emphasis). Thus parody functions in two ways simultaneously: it points out the less effective traits of the old and creates a fresh approach.

Waugh is supported by the other pioneer of metafiction, Hutcheon:

> Parody develops out of the realization of the literary inadequacies of a certain convention. Not merely an unmasking of a non-functioning system, it is also a necessary and creative process by which new forms appear to revitalize the tradition and open up new possibilities to the artist. Parodic art both is a deviation from the norm and includes that norm within itself as backgrounded material. Forms and conventions become energizing and freedom-inducing in the light of parody. (Hutcheon 1991, 50)

Both Hutcheon and Waugh deem metafictive parody as something that brings about change and development in literature, taking something that no longer works and making it better. However, Waugh also acknowledges the possibility of negative reception: parody can also be received as disparaging.

As Hallila states, parody is “a central characteristic of postmodernist literature and art” which is also often made use of in metafiction (2006, 99. Translation by KH). Hallila further states that postmodernist parody often focuses on the modernist and realist traditions (2006, 62). Considering the statements made by Hutcheon, Waugh and Hallila parody and metafiction can thus be stated to have a lot in common: both concepts often deal with (at least seemingly) modernist or realist artefacts, both are in some ways linked to postmodernism and both are employed in relation to renewal and constructive criticism. Therefore one can conclude that parody and metafiction are, if not related concepts, then complementary ones: one enriches the other.

For a genre or an artefact to be a possible object of parody, its conventions or characteristics must be widely recognised: Hallila uses the example of John Barth's *Coming Soon!!!*, which opens with "Call me ditsy", an ironic allusion to *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville (2006, 105). As Waugh states, "The parodist/metafictionist, using an established mode of fiction, lays bare the conventions that individual works of the mode share (which therefore define it) and fuses them with each other to extrapolate an 'essence'" (1984, 78). Genres are therefore an optimal choice for an object of parody: they are often easier to recognise as being parodied than perhaps individual works – unless, or course, the work in question is as widely known as, for example, the abovementioned *Moby Dick.* As stated above in relation to Waugh, what is often parodied is the novel in general, or its characteristics.

The spy novel appears to be a fruitful genre for metafiction as apparently there exists ". . . the genre's tendency to blur the line between fiction and fact" (Attridge 2013, 132). What makes the genre optimal for parody is that the spy novel is also a well established genre. Furthermore, as Price notes, "While the spy story is one of the most popular genres of fiction, it is in England that the grand masters of the genre exist. The likes of Ambler, Buchan, Fleming, Forsyth, Greene and Le Carré are found nowhere else in such numbers" (1994 , 55), which implies that for a British writer the spy story is a ample source to be parodied as it is widely read and therefore recognised in the country.

As for the analysis section below, in relation to *Sweet Tooth* I will not consider the crises of the parodied genres in question as such, but instead I will be focusing on what is parodied and why. It should be noted, however, that parody and metafiction are by no means concepts that can only be used in relation to one another. While there is parody without metafiction and metafiction without parody, the two work well together and make use of one another, especially as a force for literary development and renewal.

2.2.3 The Metanovel

> Metafiction differs from traditional fiction through its manipulations in narrative perspectives. The fixed vantage point and enclosed subject characteristic of traditional narrative fiction are unleashed by the metafictionist. (Pearse 1980, 74)

A special subdivision of metafiction is the metanovel, on which very little academic text has been published or made available. Thus for the purposes of this thesis I rely mainly on the theory provided by Lowenkron. Outside of Lowenkron's text, when given a brief explanation, the term is for the most part used in concordance with Lowenkron's theory (for example Sadovska 2007, 67; Volek 1984, 26-27). This, I believe, justifies the use of this single theoretical text as the basis for my analysis.

Lowenkron defines the term as follows: "A metanovel is a work in which an inner fiction, narrated by an inner persona, is intercalated in an outer one. The inner novelist perceives while he is perceived, creates while he is created, and has free will while he is determined" (1976, 343). The metanovel, in essence a novel within a novel, lays bare the process of making literary fiction: an author writes about an author writing fiction or about a reader reading fiction, or both. This, I believe, is the motivation behind the metanovel: "the most evident real experience of exploring the process of fiction making" (Pearse, 1980, 75). The novelist wants to draw the reader's attention to the actual making of fiction, and to its status as an artefact.

One thing should, however, be kept in mind in relation to the term. The metanovel is different from the aforementioned frame story in that in a metanovel there are traditionally no inner and outer stories (while it is of course possible). In the case of the metanovel, the single narrative is being created by the novelist in the book as he is created, thus generating an inherently metafictive narrative paradox. It is noteworthy here that Hutcheon, while not making use of the term 'metanovel', recognises the phenomenon Lowenkron refers to: "A more interesting kind of overt

diegetic self-consciousness is that in which the focus is on the process of actually writing the fictional text one is reading at the moment" (Hutcheon 1991, 53).

In certain respects the metanovel also has similar characteristics to the footnotes strategy: "Furthermore, the metanovel is found in the intersection between the novel, which deals with people, manners, and personal relationships, and the critical essay which surveys the architecture of the novel" (Lowenkron 1976, 344). Whereas both these techniques in a way combine fiction with criticism, the metanovel usually does not aim to offer a criticism of the narrative itself as such, which is what footnotes are commonly used for. Instead, in the metanovel the critical focus is on the structures and conventions of the novel as a genre.

Lowenkron states that "The metanovel has not reached that stage of evolution or codification where its formal parameters can be said to generate its content. This is not surprising in that the metanovel occurs within a genre as traditionally loose as the novel . . ." (1976, 345). However, one must note that this statement was made almost forty years ago, and academic work on the subject has developed. Being embedded in the definition-resisting genre that is the novel the metanovel must have admittedly experienced some growing pains. Furthermore, as the metanovel can be considered a branch of metafiction, another concept which resists theorisation, finding a strict definition might prove impossible. This being said, I do believe that today the metanovel can be defined in way that can be said to "generate its content".

Why, then, would an author use this *mise en abyme* technique – for which, as Hutcheon (1991, 53) also states, there is no suitable English equivalent – mirroring themselves and their work in the text? Sadovska notes that "Metafiction implies motives of inventing a story through the presence of the author-creator who has a text double in the image of the character-writer. More often than not, he is the author of the book the reader is reading, thanks to which narration acquires a mirror-like character" (2007, 67), while Hutcheon states that "Often the *mise en abyme* contains a critique of the text itself . . ." (1991, 55). The motives behind creating a metanovel appear to be

more or less related to unveiling the process of literary creation: "In the metanovel the novelist attempts to show the novel from the inside out so that the creative process itself is exposed" (Lowenkron 1976, 346). What this quotation states, and what is essential in the case of the metanovel is that while in many cases the narrative portrays the novelist as its protagonist, it is first and foremost a tale about the creation of a novel, about literary techniques, about fictionality, instead of about the novelist, as Lowenkron also states (1976, 351).

As stated above, in this thesis the metanovel is treated as a branch of metafiction, for they share similar characteristics. Whereas metafiction draws the reader's attention to itself as a piece of literary fiction, the metanovel does the same with the exception that it draws the reader's attention to the process of creating literary fiction.

> . . . a metanovel is a literary work that at the same time presents fiction and reflects the process of its creation, i.e., the process of fictionalization. Ambivalence that constantly provokes doubt in the authenticity of pictures created by the writer, the feeling of uncertainty concerning the relations between reality and fiction, and emphasis on interactions with the reader have become inalienable characteristics of metafiction. (Sadovska 2007, 67)

Thus while most, if not all, metanovels are metafictive, not all representatives of metafiction are metanovels.

Having outlined the characteristics of metafiction, the metanovel and parody, it is possible to move on to analysing the primary source of this thesis, *Sweet Tooth*.

3 Double Agents and Postmodernist Tricks – Analysis

In *Sweet Tooth* the protagonist, Serena Frome – rhymes with plume (McEwan 2013, 1) – tells her life story in first-person narration. What the reader learns is that Serena likes reading, boys and making her mother proud. She is pretty and smart, which is unfair since her younger sister is neither. She enjoys drinking cheap beer and listening to less known bands in small pubs, and is

quick to draw conclusions from other people's behaviour. She likes to think of herself as 'bad', but she is in fact rather good. She is a little full of herself, sometimes selfish, but at times also insecure. Or is she?

Sweet Tooth is not what it seems to be at first sight: a spy novel written in the form of a memoir, a fictitious autobiography. The novel appears to be historically accurate: the presence of Cold War is an underlying theme throughout the book, as well as the descriptions of milieu which ground the plot effectively into 1970s London. It is thus possible to categorise this particular narrative as a spy novel, an autobiography, and a historical novel (depending on the definition, naturally). The discussion below will demonstrate that in addition *Sweet Tooth* can also be classified as highly metafictive, and furthermore, a metanovel.

Section 3.1 discusses *Sweet Tooth* in terms of its metafictive features: what, in essence, makes the novel metafictive. This section makes use of the aforementioned characteristics and techniques associated with metafiction, applying them to *Sweet Tooth*. The section is essential for the actual analysis part in 3.2, as it validates *Sweet Tooth* as the primary source material for this thesis. Furthermore, section 3.1 acts as a precursor for section 3.2 in which the reasons for employing these literary devices are discussed. The quotations in sections 3.1 and 3.2 are from *Sweet Tooth* unless otherwise stated.

3.1 Use of Metafiction in *Sweet Tooth*

As mentioned above, *Sweet Tooth* employs various metafictional devices. Intertextual references to literary classics are abundant: the narrator appears to go out of their way to prove they are well-read and familiar with literature, to the point of arrogance. For instance, by my calculations there are over 120 direct references to authors and book titles: for example George Orwell and his *1984* and

Animal Farm are mentioned on various occasions throughout the novel. References to reading, English literature, bookshops and books in general exceed 50 (again, my own calculations), which means that roughly on every seventh page someone either reads, wants to read, visits a book shop or mentions English literature – and this is in addition to the more than 120 references to book titles and authors. In addition to these, the narrative deals with a vast variety of other literary issues as will be demonstrated below. It can thus be stated that the theme of *Sweet Tooth* is literature in its various forms.

In the beginning of the narrative a college degree in English is viewed as something not worthwhile: as the narrator states, "Left to myself I would have chosen to do a lazy English degree at a provincial university far to the north or west of my home" (2013, 2). Moreover, Serena continues:

> [My mother's] certainty frightened me. She said it was my duty as a woman to go to Cambridge to study maths. . . . She told me she would not permit me to waste my talent. I was to excel and become extraordinary. I must have a proper career in science or engineering or economics. . . . My mother told me she would never forgive me and she would never forgive herself if I went off to read English and became no more than a slightly better educated housewife than she was. I was in danger of *wasting my life.* (2013, 4. Original emphasis)

Surprisingly enough, her degree in maths appears to be of no use except on one occasion throughout the novel (2013, 236), whereas her interest in literature turns out to be the main enforcer of change and development in her life. The protagonist takes pride in being well-read: ". . . I had begun to feel indispensable. Over-confident, perhaps. But who else in this room apart from me had ever, as an adult, read a short story in his leisure time?" (2013, 113). Through her knowledge of literature she is able to make herself useful for MI5, thus enabling her superiors to offer her a bigger role in an actual operation, a role that an ordinary junior assistant officer, "lowest of the low" (2013, 42), would not be offered.

At one point the protagonist describes her life as if it were an excerpt from a Jane Austen novel: "I present these details not to complain, but in the spirit of Jane Austen, whose novels I had

once raced through at Cambridge. How can one understand the inner life of a character, real or fictional, without knowing the state of her finances? *Miss Frome, newly installed in diminutive lodgings at number seventy St Augustine's Road, London North West One, had less than one thousand a year and a heavy heart*" (2013, 49. Original italics). While the book is presented as an autobiography, the reader is consistently made aware of the presence of fictitiousness. Ordinary, daily occasions are given a narrative spin, and literary creation is everywhere and anywhere: "I felt myself relaxing, even *dissolving*, the way people do in romantic novels" (2013, 71. Original emphasis). This provides an interesting contrast to what the protagonist initially states, how she will waste no time recounting the time when nothing "strange or terrible" happened (2013, 2).

In addition, while being well-read and imaginative, Serena also views her life through literature, and values the books she reads by how well she can relate to them: "I suppose I would not have been satisfied until I had in my hands a novel about a girl in a Camden bedsit who occupied a lowly position in MI5 and was without a man" (2013, 76). At this point the attentive reader might realise that this is the exact book they have in their hands, and a reader familiar with postmodernist literary theory can guess what is coming their way. The author of the book has not been able to resist the challenge to hint at the outcome. The technique applied here is the aforementioned *mise en abyme*, mirroring the outcome of the novel within the narrative. This, however is not the only instance of *mise en abyme* in the novel, as will become clear below when discussing Haley's short stories.

The continuous presence of reading and books in general is another metafictional trait of the novel. Hutcheon's words quoted above should be noted here: the subject matter of reading does not make a narrative self-conscious, only self-reflective (1991, 23), yet this covert form of narrative narcissism can still be counted as metafiction. Whenever Serena has nothing else to do, she reads. If she has extra money, and even when she does not, she spends it on books: "That year it was mostly modern stuff in paperbacks I bought from charity and second-hand shops in the High Street or,

when I thought I could afford it, from Compendium near Camden Lock" (2013, 75). Furthermore, everything she acquires for her room, ignoring the essentials, is to facilitate her reading habit: an armchair and a lamp. Moreover, the only keepsake she has of her former lover Tony is a bookmark, as he was unhappy with how she left books lying about, which "ruined the spine" (2013, 77). Everywhere she goes, she firstly takes notice of any books in her sight, and on occasion takes solace in her ability to discuss them – even though, despite having read a lot, she does view her own knowledge as rudimentary, not being a professional or having an actual academic degree in the subject (2013, 103).

A more apparent feature of metafiction appears when the narrator of *Sweet Tooth* addresses the reader directly. This happens on three occasions in the novel: first when the narrator quotes a famous novel and consequently questions the reader's literary knowledge (2013, 7); for the second time as if to confirm that the reader has asked about Tony Canning as a lover (2013, 22). The third occasion takes place when the narrator discusses a co-worker of hers: "But when I joined in 1972 Trimingham was already a legend among the new girls. *Remember*, we were in our early twenties, she was in her mid-thirties" (2013, 46. Emphasis added). On these occasions the narrative takes on a conversational tone. In addition, there are other less direct instances of talking to the reader, for example "*Here*, on the eighteenth of thirty-nine pages. . ." (2013, 120. Emphasis added), where the protagonist talks as if the reader was right there on the eighteenth page of Haley's short story with them.

The novel is also aware of its status as a narrative from the start, and the story-like status is emphasised throughout: within the first few sentences, the narrator makes it clear that they already know how their story ends: ". . . almost forty years ago I was sent on a secret mission for the British security service. I didn't return safely" (2013, 1). Making the self-awareness more obvious, the narrator goes on to state that they will not waste time on childhood and adolescence (2013, 1). The protagonist also asserts that nothing in Tony Canning's behaviour when they first meet "fitted with

what I came to know of him later" (2013, 15). Later the narrator points out that as the mirror now "tells a different story", they can admit that at the time the narrative takes place they were "rather gorgeous" (2013, 17). There is a mentioning of a bookmark, on which the narrator promises to elaborate later on (2013, 16). When Serena is called into Harry Tapp's office (2013, 100), the narrator points out that this is "when the story began". The final instance of narrative self-consciousness happens, when the narrator states that they have often reminisced and had comfort in the events they have previously described (2013, 306). The final chapter of the book is a different matter, which will be discussed below.

A related method, bordering on autocriticism, takes place when the narrator questions their own choice of words: "Reading was my way of not thinking about maths. More than that (or do I mean less?), it was my way of not thinking" (2013, 6). Without commenting on the resolution of the book as that will be discussed in detail below, could this questioning be the actual author of the novel leaking through? What is more, here the protagonist emphasises yet again the meaning of literature in their life. Not only do they take solace in their ability to discuss literature, they also use it to escape less pleasing aspects of their everyday life. Literature, for Serena, is a safe haven in various ways.

In addition to the abovementioned, *Sweet Tooth* is also a frame story (cf. Currie 1995, quoted above). As the novelist Tom Haley is introduced, he brings along his short stories which are presented through Serena's reading. Haley's narratives include a story about identical twin brothers using their similar looks to avoid disappointing people and simultaneously having the opportunity for mischief; a tale about a struggling novelist with an ape as her lover; one about a lonely man who falls in love with a mannequin; another about a husband trying to prove his wife's infidelity, and finally, a narrative about a husband who through a series of events finds out that his wife is not who he thinks she is. All of the short stories are metafictive in themselves as well: the story about the brothers makes use of doubles, which is a trait of metafiction. The tale of the struggling novelist

turns out to be a story written by the novelist in the story, whereas the mannequin loving man confuses reality with fantasy. Finally, both stories focusing on husbands and wives deal with deception. Furthermore, every one of Haley's short stories relates to the frame narrative in one way or another, another case of *mise en abyme* as mentioned above. Haley's first novel, *From the Somerset Levels*, while not being metafictive, relates to the outer narrative as well: in the end everyone is ruined in one way or another.

Whereas Haley's short stories refer back to the outer narrative, there are also intertextual references in *Sweet Tooth*. Leaving aside the aforementioned direct references to authors and book titles, there are allusions to for example Shakespeare (2013, 354) and Jacqueline Susann (2013, 7), but also less overtly to McEwan's earlier work, namely short stories included in his collection *In Between the Sheets* (1978): the story about the novelist and the ape shares characteristics with McEwan's short story "Reflections of a Kept Ape", while the narrative on the man with the mannequin is similar to McEwan's "Dead as They Come". Whereas being much less controversial than its predecessor, Haley's "Pawnography" deals with infidelity and settling the score, the inspiration being McEwan's "Pornography". Finally, Haley's novel *From the Somerset Levels*, telling the story of a father and daughter in a "doomed dystopia", "the modish apocalypse" (2013, 227), is very similar to McEwan's "Two Fragments", both narratives taking place in London. As with much of intertextual references, these can easily go unnoticed for a reader unfamiliar with McEwan's early work.

One of the recurring themes in *Sweet Tooth* is Serena's speed reading. At first she takes pride in her ability to read faster than the people around her: "I enjoyed reading novels. I went fast – I could get through two or three a week – and doing that for three years would have suited me just fine" (2013, 2); "To the irritation of those around me, I'd turn a page every few seconds with an impatient snap of the wrist" (2013, 6-7); "Anyone watching me might have thought I was consulting a reference book, I turned the pages so fast" (2013, 75). In fact, Serena admits to

skipping the parts she finds irrelevant of focuses on, for example, character development and relationships (2013, 7). This is all well and good until along comes Tony Canning, who at first is impressed by her speed, only to come to learn that it is at the expense of her skipping the details, the essence of what she has read (2013, 25-26). Consequently, Tony teaches Serena how to "gut" a book (2013, 30). In fact, an ongoing plotline of *Sweet Tooth* is how Serena grows and matures as a reader of fictional texts: how she becomes to appreciate quality over quantity, unlike what she does initially.

Once Serena meets Tom Haley, she begins to assume more or less seriously that everything and anything she does around Tom he will be able to use as source material for his future fictions. She wonders what may have inspired certain people or things in the stories, and how much of himself has Tom actually written into his characters and plots. Considering how she fears he will write something personal and private about her, it is almost contradictory that when she first meets Tom, she strongly associates him with his characters: "But here he was, twin brother, smug vicar, smart and rising Labour MP, lonely millionaire in love with an inanimate object" (2013, 162). It appears as though Serena sees Tom, and perhaps fiction writers in general, as only able to write about their own experiences, equating the author with the narrator, the creator with the character. As one of Haley's short stories – "Probable Adultery" – demonstrates, writers are presented in *Sweet Tooth* as curious, ever-learning people who acquire their material from their surroundings; precisely what Serena fears.

As demonstrated above, most of *Sweet Tooth* is related to literature in one way or another. Leaving aside Serena's infatuation with literature, there are references to literary awards – the fictional Jane Austen Prize for Fiction and the "newfangled" Booker (2013, 286) – meetings with publishers, how stories are created, literary reviews, a column focusing on fiction, hasting publication to be eligible for an award... *Sweet Tooth m*ore or less unveils the industry and processes that are involved in the process of making and evaluating literature. It is not, however,

only literary references and the presence of books that make *Sweet Tooth* metafictive. A major theme of the novel is espionage: Serena works for MI5, in an undercover mission because of which she cannot reveal who she actually is. This is noteworthy especially in relation to something Serena states:

> [Writers] should make use of the real world, the one we all shared, to give plausibility to whatever they had made up. So, no tricksy [sic] haggling over the limits of their art, no showing disloyalty to the reader by appearing to cross and recross in disguise the borders of the imaginary. No room in the books I liked for the double agent. (2013, 77)

Serena is in fact a double agent of the more traditional kind herself. She is obviously an agent in her work for MI5 and the Sweet Tooth operation, but as her infatuation towards Tom grows, she becomes more of a double agent. Furthermore, she is well aware that Tom's novel *From the Somerset Levels* will not be praised by her superiors, and she dreads the moment she has to reveal the topic of the book.

While being a double agent, Serena also does some detective work of her own: she has a hard time believing that Tony is completely honest with her as he breaks up with her, and she tries to put the pieces together from little scraps of information she is able to get her hands on. However, along the way she might come across people who are trying to solve the same puzzle, or alternatively trying to lead Serena astray: she ". . . seeks solutions through the arrangement of evidence and the stories of witnesses; but who also needs to be careful about believing the wrong thing" (de Groot 2010, 125). Deception is thus yet another recurring motif of *Sweet Tooth*. It occurs in all of Haley's short stories, in Serena's work, in her relationships; she both deceives and is deceived. Very little in *Sweet Tooth* is in fact what it looks like.

Sweet Tooth calls the reader's attention to the fact that it is a literary artefact by using both thematic and formal means, or in Hutcheon's terms, both diegetically and linguistically (1991, 22-23). Serena's entire life is a fiction: her roommates, her lover, not even her family knows what she actually does for a living. Her life is a fiction in ways she is not even aware of: she is given the

Sweet Tooth case even though there are young women working for MI5 with much more suitable (and successful) academic background for the task, yet Serena is chosen for the sole reason that she was brought in by Tony Canning: MI5 want to keep an eye on her (2013, 254). Everything in *Sweet Tooth* is fiction, anything can and is made into a story. The narrators description of Tony Canning's wife finding Serena's blouse, the "scene" (2013, 36) that follows, how Tony "cast himself as the victim" (2013, 36), everything is as if scripted beforehand – which, ironically, in the case of this particular incident turns out to be true. Once Serena learns the true motivation behind Tony's actions, "the real story", she has to "rewrite" history (2013, 58).

Also the change in narrative perspective draws the reader's focus to the fact that they have a literary artefact on their hands: in fact, the use of metafiction complicates the identification of the narrator. From Booth's three types of narrator (1967, 92-93, quoted above), the narrator of *Sweet Tooth* could be deemed as either the implied author, as in Tom Haley, or as the dramatised narrator, as in Serena. It would appear safe to state that up until the very last chapter the narrator is the latter one, as described by Booth as personified to a great extent (1967, 93) which Serena is, and in the last chapter the narrator is the implied author, a "highly refined and selected version, wiser, more sensitive, more perceptive than any real man could be" (Booth 1967, 92).

In addition to the abovementioned, there are features of metafiction present that are less easily categorised: the prolific characters in the story consist mostly of readers and writers in one way or another, there are detailed descriptions of reading and creating prose, or the phases that go into the creative processes of creating prose and into creating an actual book. Reading and literature in general appears to be the number one pastime for most of the characters. There is even a character, Shirley, who writes "tiny stories about stories" (2013, 52), a metafictive exclamation point in itself.

While Tony Canning is not an ambassador for fiction, however much he wants to direct Serena's reading, he is rather particular and pedantic when it comes to reading as an experience:

"Tony Canning used to tell me off for leaving books lying around open and face down. It ruined the spine, causing a book to spring open at a certain page, which was a random and irrelevant intrusion on a writer's intentions and another reader's judgement" (2013, 77). Tony Canning appears to be a sort of literary purist: in his opinion the experience of reading should not be trifled with, but instead the narrative should come from the author to the reader as the former has intended, and the latter can interpret it according to their own reading experience.

As stated, parody is a prominent feature in metafiction. *Sweet Tooth* does not seem to parody specific texts. Instead, as Waugh also suggests above to be common, it has the characteristics of parody in relation to entire genres: the autobiography, the spy novel and, perhaps most importantly, realist literature. I state that it has the characteristics of parody: in my opinion the satirical elements of the novel are not pronounced to the extent that *Sweet Tooth* could be considered *a* parody. Yet, as stated, the traits can be seen, and are discussed below in relation to the genres that in the novel are subject to parody.

Sweet Tooth is initially easy to recognise as an autobiography: the narrator recounts their life chronologically in first person narrative, beginning from childhood and progressing through adolescence into adulthood. However, as the narrator states, "I won't waste much time on my childhood and teenage years" (McEwan 2013, 1); "Nothing strange or terrible happened to me during my first eighteen years and that is why I'll skip them" (2013, 2). Is it only strange or terrible things that can go into an autobiography? There are traces of satire in how the protagonist of the autobiography is portrayed (exaggeration, irony), to the extent that makes the reader wonder whether or not the text is in fact what it appears to be.

Sweet Tooth also parodies the spy novel genre. The Cold War provides the backdrop to Serena's spy story as she works for the MI5 in a minor position, and when given a part in an actual operation she starts to believe she is more important to the cause than she actually is. She finds a scrap of paper that she believes to be an important clue, and chooses to think of Haley's background

information as "the Haley file" (2013, 115). As a spy, Serena is not credible: she is portrayed as a beautiful blonde who is led by her feelings rather than her intelligence and who is most concerned about receiving black marks, which seems a somewhat minor matter when it comes to the other operations of MI5 and national security in general. In comparison to, for example, Le Carré's 1974 book *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, which similarly to *Sweet Tooth* also deals with themes of the Cold War and being a double agent, Serena's version of espionage becomes humorous.

Finally, *Sweet Tooth* parodies the realist novel genre and its description of life and the world: Serena repeatedly states that she prefers realist literature and that life as she knows it should be created on the page as it is, without tricks (2013, 214). It is the overemphasising that gives the novel a feel of parody: Serena craves for realism to the extent that it becomes ironic, especially in to her life. Furthermore, in telling the story from Serena's first person narration the novel focuses on the individual, (in this case) her imagination and the people around her. This was stated above to be the common focus of the realist novel (Alter 1975, 87, quoted above), which results in that the choice of point of view parodies the concept of the realist novel even further.

As *Sweet Tooth* cannot be stated to be an outright parody, it could be argued to be a pastiche, which in the OED is defined as "A work, esp. of literature, created in the style *of* someone or something else; a work that humorously exaggerates or parodies a particular style."; "The technique of incorporating distinctive elements of other works or styles in a literary composition, design, etc." (OED online, accessed April 10th 2015. Original emphasis). However, the ending of *Sweet Tooth* in my opinion tilts the narrative towards parody rather than pastiche: the rug is pulled from underneath both the realistic novel and the autobiography's feet.

At this point it appears to be safe to state that *Sweet Tooth* is not only a novel that is conscious of being literature, but in addition it is a novel on literature (cf. Walsh 1995, quoted above). Finally, what makes *Sweet Tooth* a suitable source for metafictive analysis is the fact that it is a metanovel. This only becomes apparent in the very last chapter of the book, when Serena reads

a letter from Tom Haley as Tom confesses to having written Serena's "autobiography". However, there are references to metanovels earlier on in the novel. Having read one of Haley's short stories Serena states that

> Only on the last page did I discover that the story I was reading was actually the one the woman was writing. . . . *No*. And no again. Not that. . . . I instinctively distrusted this kind of fictional trick. I wanted to feel the ground beneath my feet. There was, in my view, an unwritten contract with the reader that the writer must honour. No single element of an imagined world or any of its characters should be allowed to dissolve on authorial whim. The invented had to be as solid and as self-consistent as the actual. This was a contract based on mutual trust. (2013, 224. Original emphasis.)

It is stated on a couple occasions throughout the book that Serena prefers the narratives she reads to be as realistic as possible, and no literary 'tricks' whatsoever should be used. A reader familiar with McEwan's fiction (for example *Atonement* in which a similar technique is used) might guess that it is only a matter of time: Serena will be caught in these literary tricks she loathes sooner or later. It is yet another metafictive trick of the book that Tom mentions that he had to mirror Serena in order to create the book: "My task was to reconstruct myself through the prism of your consciousness" (2013, 359); "To create you on the page I had to become you and understand you (this is what novels demand) . . ." (2013 369). Thus, in order to make the character of Serena believable, he has to put himself in her shoes. This is elaborated on in the following section.

Having outlined what makes *Sweet Tooth* metafictive it is possible to move on to discussing why *Sweet Tooth* is metafictive.

3.2 The Purpose of Metafiction in *Sweet Tooth*

Section 3.1 demonstrates that *Sweet Tooth* deals with literature in numerous ways and forms. It is obvious that McEwan uses metafiction purposefully, as he writes in a time when metafiction is a recognised concept, and what is more, he has used metafictive features in his earlier work as well,

proving that he is familiar with the term and its conventions. It can thus be argued that there is a motivation behind using metafictive features in his writing, which I discuss below in relation to *Sweet Tooth*.

As mentioned, *Sweet Tooth* grounds itself in reality: real life events and historical accuracy are paid attention to, and, furthermore, Serena's preference for realism in literature is made abundantly clear. Also *Sweet Tooth* appears at first glance to be a realistic novel.

> I craved a form of naive realism. I paid special attention, I craned my readerly [sic] neck whenever a London street I knew was mentioned, or a style of frock, a real public person, even a make of car. Then, I thought, I had a measure, I could gauge the quality of the writing by its accuracy, by the extent to which it aligned with my own impressions, or improved upon them. (2013, 76)

The book goes to lengths to make itself seem like a representative of realism: McEwan has written people from his own life into characters for the book, for example Martin Amis (2013, 286) and Tom Maschler (2013, 234). The three-day workweek actually happened in the seventies. The place names, streets, tube stations are actual locations in London, where most of the narrative is set. Leading the reader to believe they are reading a realistic novel makes the twist at the end all the more dramatic. While there are hints here and there about postmodernist "tricks", the ending might still surprise some readers.

As mentioned in the section on parody, genres are made anew by parodying the existing conventions, by taking the old and taking it to the extreme, thus reforming the source that is parodied (cf. Hutcheon 1991, Waugh 1984, quoted above). *Sweet Tooth* goes to such lengths to prove and accentuate its realist features that it can be nothing other than parody (and the final chapter supports this). It would be an impossible task for Haley to portray Serena's life exactly as it has happened: for one, he has not been present for the first two decades of her life, and thus he is forced to rely on what others tell him. Secondly, keeping in mind that Tom is portrayed as an aspiring author hoping to make a name for himself, he makes the "conscious" decision to leave out the less interesting parts.

As stated in relation to the theory of the novel, in this particular realist genre the world we live in is usually portrayed as true-to-life as possible. Moghadam and Termizi note that ". . . new literary movements are born or old ones are revived when the current ones are taken to extreme" (2013, 1458). *Sweet Tooth* goes to extremes in two ways: in referring to literature and reading as much as possible, and in its attempt to make the reader believe they are reading a realist novel. What Moghadam and Termizi state is in accordance with Hutcheon and Waugh's views on parody: through exaggeration old forms of literature can be revived and made new again. *Sweet Tooth* emphasises the fictional nature of reality by drawing the reader's attention to the tricks a writer must use to create life on the page in order to make the reader question and take notice of their life and its fictionality.

In reality, for the most part of an individual's life nothing "strange or terrible" (2013, 2) happens – at least one should hope so. In comparison to for example *Jane Eyre*, which I choose to deem as a realistic novel (as well as a romantic and a gothic one), much of the narrative consists of the protagonist alone, thinking. This is also what Serena does: to a large extent *Sweet Tooth* takes place inside Serena's head. There are other similarities between Serena and Jane, and their respective narratives as well; however, that is a topic for another study. The realist novel, having portrayed life for centuries, has been declared dead on multiple occasions. In McEwan's parodist version it is made into something fresh: a lot of similarities exist, enough for *Sweet Tooth* to be deemed a parody, yet the final chapter at least makes the end product into something completely different, something unexpected of a realist novel.

Actors are sometimes mistaken for the characters they play in a way that suggests a difficulty in telling the two apart: actors playing doctors are asked for medical advice for example. A similar thing appears to happen occasionally with authors and their characters: readers sometimes make assumptions on an author based on their books and the characters in them. This is exactly what Serena does, when she meets Tom Haley: once she sees him, she even begins to wonder if she

missed a transsexual vibe in his texts (2013, 162). While from (what the reader takes as) Serena's point of view there are some, though few, similarities between Tom and his characters, Serena's quick conclusions on this matter serve to emphasise the fact that an author and his characters are in fact two different things: while Serena ponders that "I was discovering that the experience of reading is skewed when you know, or are about to know, the author" (2013, 127), she basically equates Tom with his characters. It appears to only be fuel for Serena's fire when she reads Tom's short story "Probable Adultery" and she discovers that writers write about interesting things they have learned or seen.

However, all this is made more complicated when the reader finds out that it is in fact Tom's text they are reading, not Serena's. As mentioned, the novel is narrated in first person from the point of view of Serena. In the second sentence of the novel she points out that she "didn't return safely" (2013, 1) from the mission for MI5. The statement is ominous, perhaps leading the reader to imagine far worse things than what the narrator subsequently tells. As the narrator nonetheless repeatedly addresses the reader, they constantly reveal to the reader that they are, in fact, fine; otherwise they would surely not be around to tell their tale. This might suggests that the narrator is perhaps not completely reliable, or at the very least that they enjoy a bit of exaggeration and drama. Another explanation, however, is a metafictional paradox. The reader expects that Serena's tale is leading them towards a gruesome ending, when in fact the book ends with a marriage proposal, exactly as Serena states that she prefers (2013, 7). While in the conclusion of the book Serena's life, and her lover's life, are both momentarily ruined, she nevertheless has everything she has wanted throughout the book.

Once the reader learns that it is Tom speaking as Serena, one comes to realise that it is the professional, the scholar of literature that makes these assumptions of Serena as a reader. Or are they perhaps the writer's (in this case Tom's) assumptions of an ordinary reader in general, only personified through the protagonist Serena? The reader of *Sweet Tooth* has to question everything

after reading the final chapter: nothing is reliable any longer. As mentioned above, Haley portrays events he has not even been present at. Can the reader therefore actually be confident in that everything he describes has happened the way he describes it? Can we trust the narrator of *Sweet Tooth*? In the final chapter consisting only of Tom's letter to Serena, he reveals that the entire book has been written by him, and he, in essence, had to become her.

> This story wasn't for me to tell. It was for you. Your job was to report back to me. I had to get out of my skin and into yours. I needed to be translated, to be a transvestite, to shoehorn myself into your skirts and high heels, into your knickers, and carry your white glossy handbag on its shoulder strap. On my shoulder. Then start talking, as you. Did I know you well enough? Clearly not. Was I a good enough ventriloquist? Only one way to find out. I had to begin. (2013, 358)

As Haley states, the story was not for him to tell. The narrative trick at the end would not work in any other point of view but Serena's. While the female characters of *Sweet Tooth* come across as a bit unrealistic at times, the final chapter in a way validates their description, yet raises questions: does Tom Haley purposefully portray Serena as he does? Or is he after all not good enough a "ventriloquist"?

Reading *Sweet Tooth* for the first time I could not help but wonder what a lousy job McEwan had done, portraying his protagonist Serena: she was not quite believable as a character (more on this below). The final chapter, however, obviously changed this. Seeing as McEwan has successfully written female characters before (cf. for example *Atonement*), it appears to be safe to assume that it is Tom Haley who is made to unsuccessfully write Serena on the page. During *Sweet Tooth* all of the short stories Serena reads in some detail are presented from the point of view of the male character in the short story, thus the reader has nothing to compare the female character of Serena to. Therefore it is safe to read the quotation above as essentially a commentary on creating a character: it is an allusion to a writer's insecurities in portraying someone who is completely different from them, a reference to a leap of faith every writer must take if they wish to write other than one type of character.

The difficulties with making believable characters are visible throughout the novel. The early Serena, and at times the older one as well, are presented as slightly annoying, somewhat full of themselves. Were the book not a metanovel, but a fictional autobiography as it gives the impression of being, it is debatable whether the character would present herself differently. As it turns out in the last chapter, most of Serena's time before meeting Haley is portrayed through the tales of others: for example, initially it appears as though it is Mrs Frome who considers Serena both clever and pretty, and her younger sister Lucy neither (2013, 4), when in fact it is Lucy who is of this opinion (2013, 362). Haley's exorcism of his negative feelings continues as he states that "[Lucy]'s in awe of you, poor girl, desperate for her big sister's good opinion, which I think she rarely gets" (2013, 362). The early Serena is chiefly based on descriptions by Lucy, Max Greatorex and Jeremy Mott, two of which seem to have not only positive things to say about Serena. This explains the portrayal of younger Serena: Haley has drawn conclusions from the statements of Lucy, Max and Jeremy, and has then filled in the blanks. This is probably what most writers must do: I should think it rare to have the time and the assets to do as much research as one wants or needs to. Deadlines, funds or other limitations, and in Haley's case, the threat of exposure, must dictate much of a writer's work.

However, as Haley's vengeful thoughts subside and softer feelings take over as the book progresses, Serena becomes more humane, more likeable, more considerate of other people's feelings. Knowing how the book ends the reader can trace the subtle changes in Serena's portrayal: she sets off as vain and full of herself, setting herself up for disappointment in the big world outside her hometown. Yet, when Serena meets Haley, she becomes a better version of herself. As much as Haley attempts to write her out of his system (2013, 368), he has no choice but to state that "the inevitable happened. . . . I still love you. No, that's not it. I love you more" (2013, 369). It is easy to assume that writers create characters they have strong feelings about: love, hate, whatever the feeling, it will help make the character more believable and realistic, if the writer is not indifferent.

Or vice versa, and exactly what happens to Tom: writers can easily fall in love with their characters. As is demonstrated by Haley, to create a character demands hard work and actually delving into a character. In general this could sometimes mean becoming closer to the created character than, for example, members of the writers own family.

Initially, Serena is portrayed as almost obnoxious in regards to her reading as well: "What famous novel pithily begins like this? *The temperature hit ninety degrees the day she arrived.* Don't you know it?" (2013, 7. Original italics), and as mentioned, she takes pride in reading a great deal and doing it fast. However, obnoxious as she may be, she appears to lack confidence as a reader: "I raced through the same books, chatted about them perhaps, if there was someone around who could tolerate my base level of discourse, then I moved on" (2013, 6). This is also visible later on as Serena seems to think that her opinions on literature – and particularly on Haley's stories – matter less since she does not have a university education on the subject (2013, 205). Does McEwan use this to emphasise that while a lot of reading is good (seeing as it is reading and literature that drive Serena's life forward), it is better if one knows the theory as well? Or is it only an expression of modesty on Serena's behalf? As the reader does not actually have access to Serena's thoughts, but only to how (the bitter) Haley portrays her, it remains unclear whether the college aged Serena in fact sees her views on literature as base level.

It is safe to assume that the majority of people reading *Sweet Tooth* do not have a university education in literature. The character of Serena is thus someone ordinary readers might be able to relate to. *Sweet Tooth* is in fact a study in reading literature, one "everyday" reader's journey.

> My needs were simple. I didn't bother much with themes or felicitous phrases and skipped fine descriptions of weather, landscapes and interiors. I wanted characters I could believe in, and I wanted to be made curious about what was to happen to them. . . . It was vulgar to want it, but I liked someone to say 'Marry me' by the end. Novels without female characters were a lifeless desert. Conrad was beyond my consideration, as were most stories by Kipling and Hemingway. . . . I read anything I saw lying around. Pulp fiction, great literature and everything in between – I gave them all the same rough treatment. (2013, 7)

The novel begins with consuming every literary text one is able to get their hands on, moves on to actually focusing on what one reads and beginning to appreciate the details, becoming more able to rate and value literature based on its literary merits, and finally ends up as being a literary artefact in itself. In a way, *Sweet Tooth* is a guide book on how to read, where Serena is the pupil and the men in her life are the teachers, most obvious of which are the characters of Tony Canning and Tom Haley: through these characters and their interaction with Serena the reader becomes aware of the practices that direct their own reading processes. *Sweet Tooth* offers the reader a guide on how to approach literature: for example, Canning is not satisfied with Serena's speed reading on the expense of actually internalising what she has read. Thus, he teaches her how to read 'properly' (2013, 30).

> I resented his persistence. I wanted us to be lovers, not teacher and pupil. I was annoyed with him as well as myself when I didn't know the answers. And then a few querulous sessions later, I began to feel some pride and not simply in my improved performance. I started to take note of the story itself. Here was something precious and it seemed as if I'd discovered it on my own, like Soviet oppression. (2013, 26)

As Serena states, she began to notice the actual story, not only the words on the page. She can now appreciate a narrative for more than solely for someone living happily ever after:

> As I lay in the dark, waiting for sleep, I thought I was beginning to grasp something about invention. As a reader, a speed-reader, I took it for granted, it was a process I never troubled myself with. You pulled a book from the shelf and there was an invented, peopled world, as obvious as the one you lived in. . . . I thought I had the measure of the artifice, or I almost had it. Almost like cooking, I thought sleepily. Instead of heat transforming the ingredients, there's pure invention, the spark, the hidden element. What resulted was more than the sum of the parts. (McEwan 2013, 247)

Serena thus begins to take notice of the creation of a narrative: that it is not merely a standalone artefact, but that someone has invented, created, put together everything that is between the covers; that it takes ingenuity and effort to create an interesting narrative.

Haley, on the other hand, shows her a poem, and when he discovers she has only read the lines and not the actual poem, he attempts to teach her how to do it (2013, 206-207), to read beyond the words. The character of Haley is intriguing as well in that in addition to being a writer, he is also

a teacher of literature when Serena first meets him, providing another dimension into Serena's development as a reader: she in essence is taught how to read by someone who is a literary professional in more ways than one. It is interesting to note here that McEwan has a degree in none other than English literature. The way studying English is initially portrayed – lazy, provincial – gives food for thought. Is this how McEwan sees the education he also has? Or is this perhaps the common opinion of the public, and the narrative attempts to show that in certain circumstances one can get quite far in life by reading books?

Sweet Tooth is also a journey into creating literature. Even though it appears at first that the reader does not have the privilege of actually witnessing the processes that go on in a writer's mind, except from Serena's point of view, the last chapter reveals the procedure. Haley goes into detail concerning the processes he had to go through to be able to speak as Serena, to be her. He narrates the large amount of research he has put into the text, and vice versa, how at times "events wrote whole sections for me" (2013, 365). How he initially tries to write the story from his point of view, but then realises it is more interesting told from Serena's. In the last chapter the process of creating fiction is made visible for the reader: it is not simply that an author sits down and writes, it takes research, it takes thought, a lot of planning and a lot of sitting. The chapter shows that sometimes writers write from experience: events write whole chapters. Other times, however, a lot of work must be done before the actual writing can even begin, people must be interviewed, places visited, techniques tried and if failed, tried again.

However, not only does Tom's description of the process give the reader glimpses into creating fiction, it also blurs the line between fiction and reality. What the reader has thought to be a somewhat realistic (in the sense of style) novel, eventually turns out to be something else all together. What, then, is real, what is fiction? Is everything around us actually textual?

> I wasn't impressed by those writers . . . who infiltrated their own pages as part of the cast, determined to remind the poor reader that all the characters and even they themselves were pure inventions and that there was a difference between fiction and

> life. Or, to the contrary, to insist that life was a fiction anyway. Only writers, I thought, were ever in danger of confusing the two. (2013, 76)

When considering what a multilayered fiction her own life is, this statement from Serena is ironic. This particular irony, however, falls away with the last chapter of the book. Haley has been led astray by Serena, and chooses to portray her hypocrisy in her words, adding the eyebrow-raising "only writers could confuse the two". While Serena is portrayed as having a guilty conscience concerning lying to Tom, she does in life exactly what she states repeatedly to dislike in literature. Serena does not practice what she preaches. Yet something remains unclear: while she views her life through fiction, does she in fact realise that her life is a rather intricate fiction? What this does metafictively is that it raises questions regarding the reader and their life. Do I practice what I preach? Is my life fictive as well?

And of course, there is the never-ending namedropping. One of the reasons is without a doubt the aforementioned realistic touch: Haley for example, is a guest in the same reading as Martin Amis, Kingsley Amis's son (2013, 292). Furthermore, the names of writers place the narrative in a literary context, a reference point: Haley undoubtedly is familiar with all the writers he mentions, perhaps wishing to be mentioned alongside them in the future once his literary career takes off. But why give the reader the impression that Serena is familiar with all of these writers? It can be argued that Haley gives Serena a thorough knowledge of literature to validate the opinions she provides on his fictions: she has read her fair share, therefore what she thinks of the short stories can be taken seriously, even though she lacks a university education. In addition to few short excerpts it is, after all, only "Serena's" opinions and comments that the reader has, as none of the actual short stories are offered in the book as entire narratives.

The short stories, as mentioned, have themes and motifs that eventually make their way into the actual narrative as well. While the narrator addressing the reader acts as a precursor to the fact that they are alive and well, the short stories provide the reader with hints as to what is about to happen in the main story: Haley's stories include mirroring, spying, deceit, postmodernist trickery,

an author's struggle, and these are all a part of the short stories as well as the actual novel. This use of *mise en abyme* gives the clever reader an edge: it is possible to figure out the direction of the narrative, perhaps not to exact detail but to a certain extent. It is also possible that McEwan has drawn inspiration for *Sweet Tooth* from his earlier work, seeing as there are the aforementioned similarities between Haley's and some of McEwan's narratives. Intertextual references to McEwan's other stories is discussed further below.

Sweet Tooth, being metafictive, offers its author (in this case Haley) a chance for autocriticism. Serena's first task for the operation Sweet Tooth is to read and comment on the short stories of Haley. With Haley being actually the one presenting the views as Serena's, it is easy to assume that he inserts thoughts on what he would like to correct in "his" texts, and vice versa, praise the parts he enjoys, and he does in fact admit this in the final chapter: "Then my ludicrous vanity, sexual, sartorial, above all aesthetic – why else make you linger interminably over my stories, why else italicize my favourite phrases?" (2013, 369). The reader does not in fact get to know what Serena actually thinks of the short stories, only what she tells Haley explicitly, and what Haley assumes she thinks of them. In *Atonement*, the fictitious author of the book the reader has in their hands states that she has altered the 'real story' to provide a better ending.

> No one will care what events and which individuals were misrepresented to make a novel. I know there's always a certain kind of reader who will be compelled to ask, But what *really* happened? The answer is simple: the lovers survive and flourish. As long as there is a single copy, a solitary typescript of my final draft, then my spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince survive to love. (McEwan 2002, 371. Original emphasis)

In the last part of *Atonement* Briony freely admits that she has not been entirely honest in her narrative concerning Robbie and Cecilia, that she gave the reader the story that would be more enjoyable, the one that atoned her actions. In this case, however, autocriticism is much clearer than in *Sweet Tooth*, where Haley claims to have portrayed events as they were (2013, 356).

It is also noteworthy that, as mentioned above, many of Haley's stories are similar to McEwan's earlier work. Having Serena read the slightly altered versions of the originals offers not

only Haley but McEwan as well a chance to criticise his own work: perhaps, having the opportunity to write those pieces again he would do it differently? As Haley states, "I know you'll be thinking of 'Pawnography' (How I regret now that punning title.)" (2013, 360). That McEwan's original was named differently is in this case irrelevant: it is the thought process that is interesting. It would seem natural that a writer, or any artist for that matter, is not happy with everything they have ever created, award winning (which McEwan's short story collection that includes "Pornography" is) or not. Would McEwan perhaps like to alter something he has published during the course of his career?

While Serena likes the first of Haley's short stories she reads, she clearly dislikes the narrative about the struggling writer with an ape lover, not only for the interspecies love affair, but for its postmodernist twist at the end. While McEwan is not exactly known for being a strictly realistic writer, he does mask his narratives as such until the very end: this is true of at least *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth*. It is Tom who speaks as Serena when she praises realism and declares her hatred for postmodernist literature, and, as mentioned, he is without actual knowledge of what Serena thinks of his stories when she first reads them. He has to base his assumptions on one conversation about John Fowles taking place in the early days of their relationship (2013, 214, quoted above), when Tom states that it is impossible "to recreate life on the page without tricks". This is exactly what Haley (and McEwan) does: he recreates life on the page using tricks, giving little clues as to what will happen in the end along the way. *Mise en abyme*, little glimpses of the outcome, is what McEwan and his alter ego Tom Haley do best.

Ultimately, Haley and McEwan hit the nail on the head with their comment on using tricks to create life on the page. In the particular case of *Sweet Tooth* this is exactly what metafiction does: it takes the perhaps in some ways outdated form of the realist novel and brings it to life again through self-reflection and other narrative trickery. As for it being possible to create life in a narrative form without tricks, I cannot say. What I can say, however, is that metafiction shows that using these

narrative tricks is a plausible way to do it. Perhaps the metafictive spin at the end is Haley's payback: you tricked me, now I tricked you, as he states, "there was always an element of tit for tat" (2013, 368). However, I do believe the more probable motivation for McEwan to have been if not an exercise in creating literature, then simply the joy of tricking the reader. And the poor reader can do nothing about it.

4 Conclusions

Sweet Tooth is a multilayered novel: its subject matter is without a doubt literature, yet along the way it deals with the spy novel, the autobiography and, above all, the realist novel. The odd portrayal of the protagonist catches the reader's attention until the very end, yet what the reader thinks of *Sweet Tooth* and its characters is turned on its head in the final chapter. It is written from a different point of view: while admittedly it is still in first person narration, the person narrating has changed. This finally breaks the illusion of realism: the narrative is no longer a realistic novel, but all of a sudden a postmodernist work of metafiction. When the true point of view is revealed and the work turns out to be a paradoxical metanovel everything becomes questionable, which appears to be a staple for McEwan.

This thesis deals with many concepts that resist theorisation: the novel, postmodernism, metafiction, the metanovel. An attempt at reaching somewhat coherent descriptions, if not actual definitions, of these theories is made above, yet it should be stated that I do not see my work as nearly exhaustive: for the purposes of this thesis, however, I claim that my work is adequate, and perhaps a starting point for future studies. I do believe, however, that this thesis succeeds in its goal in showing that metafiction is an integral part of the novel genre: that it is certainly not a threat or

rival, but something that drives the novel genre forward, something that comes from within and has existed for centuries.

In addition to showing that metafiction is an inherent part of the novel, in the beginning I stated to have two points of research. The aims of this thesis were to firstly study what makes *Sweet Tooth* metafictive, and secondly, and more importantly, what might be the motivations behind choosing this particular technique for this particular book. Metafiction was chosen for the primary theoretical viewpoint for the reason that it is a recurring characteristic in McEwan's prose, and the novel in question appeared to deal with literature in various forms. As it turned out, the novel under scrutiny proved to be a fruitful source for research, as various metafictional characteristics were found: the book employs narratives within narratives, *mise en abyme*, paradoxes, parody, readers, writers, intertextuality... Everything in the novel has something to do with fiction and fictionality, to the extent that Hutcheon's term 'narcissistic narrative' almost takes on a life of its own, and not in the least in the author Haley's vain confession of making Serena linger on his favourite parts of the short stories.

As for difficulties I encountered in relation to writing this thesis, the main one was that as *Sweet Tooth* is such a recent publication, it is not studied academically to any great extent as of yet, and I failed to find any source material on *Sweet Tooth* from the point of view of metafiction. Thus I was forced to rely mainly on general theory, as I initially suspected. The second issue was dealing with the aforementioned concepts of 'the novel' and 'metafiction', which have certain acknowledged characteristics in order to justify their status as literary concepts, and yet they resist theorisation, and upon them academics fail to agree. Thus there was an abundance of reading to be done before embarking on the writing process, which, on the other hand, is a natural part of any research process.

In my study I found that *Sweet Tooth* employs parody and its conventions, yet I do not count it as a parody. The metafiction and other literary techniques used in *Sweet Tooth* parody existing

genres in order to question their status and relevance to contemporary literature: are the genres up to date or is renewal in order, are the conventions drained dry of their innovation? As stated above, England has a vast collection of spy novel writers. As an English author, perhaps McEwan wishes for the genre to develop. However, the parodying the realist novel is more important here. Were the last chapter removed, the novel would be considered considerably less metafictive and more realist. However, the final chapter provides the necessary renewal: the realist, now metafictionist novel is made relevant and interesting again. As the image of Serena, sitting at Tom's table, not quite believing what she is reading is formed in the reader's mind, the reader realises that they too have been tricked throughout the past three and a half hundred pages. What I believe is a highly motivating aspect on the author's part is that this kind of fooling the reader is addictive, that it keeps many coming back for more – it certainly happened to me first with *Atonement* and now with *Sweet Tooth*.

As the study shows, the novel under scrutiny uses metafiction for various reasons. Nonetheless, what I deem to be essential is the blurring of the fine line between fiction and reality, in the process posing questions of life, questions of the reader and of literature as an art form, all at once. *Sweet Tooth* shows the reader the impossibility of realistic literary creation and perception, making the reader more aware of their own experience of reading: a metafictive text forces the reader to see the conventions of fiction while considering the textual and fictional aspects of life. *Sweet Tooth*, and metafiction in general, do not pose questions on literature alone: in the process the focus is also drawn to everyday life and its fictionality, the textual nature of our world and everything in it.

Compared to other kinds of literature, metafiction requires more active participation on the part of the reader: instead of being merely the passive recipient of the fictional text, the author provokes the reader's mind to be more active, and they do this by using metafictional tricks. As quoted from Stirling in the introduction above, metafiction is by no means marking the death of the

novel, but vice versa. Instead, and this is one of the main conclusions of this thesis, it is what revives the novel. It is the force that drives the novel forward, and renews it.

This thesis is by no means exhaustive, and does not intend to be: it only scrapes the surface. *Sweet Tooth* turned out to be even more metafictive than I was expecting before embarking on this study, and there remains subjects to be touched upon. One concept that could have been a prolific source for material, which I nonetheless chose to leave out of this thesis, was the historical novel. This is yet another term that is not agreed upon: *Sweet Tooth*, mainly taking place in the 1970s, can by some definitions be deemed a historical novel, and during my research I discovered that the historical novel often makes use of metafiction. However, this approach might steer the research towards Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction, which is the reason for leaving it out of this thesis: my focus was on metafiction in general.

Another possible topic of research arose when I accidentally came to think of the narratives of *Jane Eyre* and *Sweet Tooth* in comparison to one another. Both are more or less autobiographical, realistic in portrayal, in both there are characteristics of a *Bildungsroman*, and so forth. From the point of view of metafiction, or historiographic metafiction, these two could be the topic of a future study. Finally, as stated, this study is not exhaustive, and there remain metafictive features of *Sweet Tooth* to be considered, perhaps in relation to McEwan's other metafictive work.

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